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Qur'an—The Sacred Book of Islam

The Qur'an, according to Muslim belief, is a revealed book: it is not authored by a human being, but is the true word of God in human language. A medium-sized book so far as its volume is concerned, it comprises 114 chapters or surahs (77,439 words). Its revelation to the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, through the angel Gabriel, began in A.D. 610, while the Prophet was sitting in seclusion in the cave of Hera at the top of the Mountain of Light, two miles from Mecca. The scriptures were not revealed at one point of time. Their various parts were revealed as and when the occasion demanded. The entire process was completed over a period of 23 years, the last passage being revealed to the Prophet while he was addressing a gathering at Mount Arafat on the occasion of his last Hajj in A.D. 622. The entire volume was later compiled in Medina during the last days of the Prophet.

Since the Qur'an came into existence long before the days of the printing press, there were only two ways of preserving it: either by committing the entire text to memory, or writing it down on paper or other materials. That is why there have always been a great number of hafiz (those who committed the entire Qur'an to memory) in every age, right from the Qur'an's first revelation. The earliest written copies are still available in different museums, one of these being in Tashkent.

The Qur'an, addressed directly to mankind, tells us of God's scheme for human existence: that man is placed on this earth for the purpose of being tested. The freedom he has here has not been given him as a matter of right, but as a means to allow him to prove his moral fibre. It is the outcome of this test which will ultimately decide man's eternal fate. It is asserted in the holy book that human beings are eternal creatures, yet only an infinitesimal part of their lifespan has been assigned to the present world, while the remainder has been ordained for the Hereafter.

As we learn from the scriptures, all the previously revealed books had been sent by God so that man might be informed of the nature of his life. The Qur'an, the last of the revealed books, endorses all the revealed books which preceded it. But this endorsement applies to them only in their original, pristine versions. The religious scriptures preceding the Qur'an were—as is claimed by their followers—divine in origin. But from the point of view of academic authenticity, they have lost their original credibility. This is due to alteration, deletion and interpolation. According to the Qur'an, the only authentic version of God's message to mankind is that revealed by Him to His final Prophet.

The study of the Qur'an tells us that it is individual-based rather than system-oriented. That is, the actual target of the holy book is to change the thinking of the individual. Changing the system is not the Qur'an's direct objective. For the system is subservient to the individual and not the individual to the system. That is why the utmost emphasis is placed on inculcating right thinking in man. Yet, it is not the method of the Qur'an to set out everything in advance, in detail. It rather encourages individuals to think for themselves along the proper lines, so that they may discover for themselves the great truths of life. In educational terminology this is called the discovery method.

Islamic teachings can be summed up under two basic headings: (1) believing in One God and worshipping Him alone; (2) regarding all human beings as equal and according equal rights to all. In brief, monotheism and justice for all. The Qur'an enshrines these basic teachings, dealing with them in their abstract and practical forms, but for a detailed application of their wisdom, one must go to the hadith (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad).

As far as social life is concerned, the essence of Islamic teaching is that God has granted freedom to everyone. This freedom in itself demands that people should lead their lives with proper restraint. For if freedom is exercised without restraint, it will inevitably result in friction, outright clashes and the descent of society into chaos. Social equilibrium can be maintained only if conscience (nafs lawwama) prevails over ego (nafs ammara). In social life, our actions elicit good or evil depending upon whether we have activated the ego or the conscience of the person or persons concerned.

Whenever one initiates any undertaking, the Qur'an states expressly that one should begin by uttering the name of God. One thus always reminds oneself at the outset of God's attributes of benevolence and compassion. It is also a way of determining that all projects will be launched not with personal but with divine intentions, and that all actions stemming there from will be merciful rather than exploitative in nature. The most frequently repeated invocation in the Qur'an is: "In the name of God, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful." The recurrence of this phrase no less than 114 times is in itself a clear indication of how important it is.

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The preacher of God's word wishes people well, no matter how they treat him

The Prophet besieged Taif for more than twenty days. When it became difficult for the Muslims to continue with the siege, he ordered them to withdraw. It was then suggested that the Prophet bring down a curse upon the heads of the Thaqeef tribe, but the Prophet merely raised both hands and prayed: "Lord, guide the Thaqeef, and bring them into the fold of Islam." The Prophet was likewise told of the contumacy and disbelief the Daus tribe, and again it was suggested that he should invoke a curse upon them, but the Prophet's response was again to pray. "Lord, guide the Daus," he begged, "and bring them into the fold of the faithful."

Realism is the Key to Peace

Peace is a must for the survival of our civilization. Peace is must for all kinds of constructive work. As such, it is of the greatest concern to everyone. Everyone wants a peaceful society, a peaceful world. Yet, for the greater part of humanity, peace remains a distant dream. Why so? Why this sad state of affairs? Why this contradiction between ideal and practice? It is high time to go deeper into the matter. It is the duty of all sincere people to inquire into the real cause of this contradiction so that a viable peace formula may be evolved.

I have made an in-depth study of this problem from the historical as well as the Islamic viewpoints. I should like to make a brief presentation of my findings. According to my study, basically, there are two viewpoints in this matter: the concept of peace as defined by social scientists and the concept of peace as defined by the ideologists. The scientists' concept of peace is based on realities while the idealists' concept of peace is based on utopianism. In other words, on mere wishful thinking

It is mainly the ideologists' concept of peace which has created the present crisis of peace throughout the world. The scientists' formula for peace is the only practicable one, for the idealists' formula is merely a formulation of people's own wishes.

Academicians define peace as an absence of war. But the idealists differ with this notion saying that the mere absence of war is nothing. They hold that peace and justice should go hand in hand. To them the only acceptable formula is that which restores justice in its ideal sense. But the building of such a utopian world is simply impossible.

This concept of peace is seemingly beautiful. Because of this apparent beauty, it has gained general popularity. The masses everywhere are obsessed with the idealistic concept of peace. But one has to differentiate between what is possible and what is impossible. There is no other alternative. One has to be practical rather than idealistic if one wants to achieve a positive result. The object of peace is only to normalise the situation between two warring sides.

Peace is not aimed at satisfying the concerned parties in terms of rights and justice. Rights and justice are totally different issues. Linking them with peace is unnatural as well as impractical. These are goals to be worked for separately and independently. Furthermore, in this world of competition, no-one can receive peace and justice in terms of his own personal criteria. It is situations and circumstances which will dictate to what extent we can achieve these goals.

In fact, in this world of competition, it is not possible for anyone to receive perfect justice. So one has to be content with practical justice (pragmatic solutions). During my studies, I found that those people who seek peace with justice fail to achieve anything positive. Moreover, during this futile exercise they lose what they already had in their hand. Conversely, those who delink justice from peace are always

successful in life. After making this study I have come to conclusion that the scientific concept of peace is the only correct and practicable concept. Thus peace is not meant to establish justice. The purpose of peace is only to normalise the situation so that one may uninterruptedly avail of the opportunities present at that time.

To illustrate my point, I cite here two examples from history , one from the early period of Islam and one from the modern history of Japan. It is a well known fact that the Prophet of Islam was repeatedly challenged by his opponents in ancient Arabia. There were several instances of wars and violence. Then the Prophet managed to finalise a peace treaty between the Muslims and their opponents. It was known as Al-Hudaybiyah Peace Treaty in Islamic history. Now how was this peace treaty finalised? If you examine historical records, you will find that, in terms of justice being done, several problems arose. The treaty could be concluded because the Prophet was able to delink the question of justice from the question of peace. This delinking of the two issues gave him the success which is described in the Qur'an as a clear victory. (48: 1)

Now, why does the Qur'an describe this as a victory, when in fact, it was the acceptance of all the conditions imposed by his enemies. The Qur'an called this a victory because, although the peace treaty itself was devoid of justice, it instantly normalised the situation, thus enabling the Prophet to avail of the opportunities present at the time. What the Prophet lost in Hudaybiyah, he gained on a far larger scale throughout the whole of Arabia.

Now let us look at the example of Japan. In World War II, Japan was defeated by the USA. Okinawa Island was occupied by the American army after the conclusion of a peace treaty, its terms were dictated by America. Japan, willingly or unwillingly, accepted a treaty in which justice was delinked from peace. But what was the result? Within a period of forty years the entire scenario had changed. Japan did lose the Okinawa Island, but it gained the entire USA (North American continent) as its industrial market. And now it enjoys the status of a world economic superpower.

Why is it that reason and religion both advocate the acceptance of reality or unilateral adjustment in times of conflict? It is because in every adverse situation a status quo exists between the two sides. If any party opts for a change in the status quo the result will be breakdown. Instead, by accepting the status quo it will find room for advancement towards its goal.

The Qur'an says that of all courses reconciliation is the best (4:128). That is, in matters of controversy, the best policy is peaceful settlement rather than confrontation. This is because conciliation or peaceful settlement gives one scope to make progress, whereas confrontation arrests the onward journey to success.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that peace is a must not only for our advancement, but for our very survival. But peace can be attained only by accepting two simple precepts. Make all efforts to change what we can, and learn to live with the things which we cannot change. In matters which we can change we should be dedicated activists. In matters which we cannot change we should become status quoists. Otherwise, peace for us will forever remain a distant dream.

The Concept of Jihad

Jihad is regularly misconstrued as war, with all its connotations of violence and bloodshed. However, in the Islamic context, and in literal sense, the word jihad simply means a struggle – doing one's utmost to further a worthy cause. This is an entirely peaceful struggle, with no overtones even of aggression. The actual Arabic equivalent of war, is qital, and even this is meant in a defensive sense.

According to Islamic teachings, jihad is of two kinds. One is with the self (jihad bin nafs), that is, making the maximum effort to keep control over negative feelings in one's self, for instance, arrogance, jealousy, greed, revenge, anger, etc. The psychological efforts to lead such a life of restraint is what jihad bin nafs is about. In social life, it happens time and again that all sorts of base, negative feelings well up within a man, causing him to lead his life succumbing to desires and temptations. The internal effort made in such a situation to overcome the temptations of the self and to continue to lead a life guided by principles is the truly Islamic jihad bin nafs.

According to the hadith, a believer is one who wages jihad with himself in the path of obedience to God. That is, at moments when the self (nafs), lured by some temptation, desires to deviate from the path of God, he keeps control over it and remains unswervingly on the divine path. This is his jihad – a permanent feature of the life of a believer, continuing day and night, and ending only with death.

The other form of jihad is that which is engaged in to propagate the constructive message of Islam. All those who embark upon such a course must first of all study the Qur'an and sunnah in a dispassionate and objective manner. No kind of conditioning should be allowed to come in the way of such a study. Only after passing through this intellectual jihad will the would-be proponent of Islam be in a position to make a true representation of his religion.

Two conditions have been laid down in the Qur'an for the communication of the teachings of Islam to others – nasih, well-wishing and amin, trustworthiness. The former appertains to God and the latter to man.

What is meant by nasih (well-wishing) is an earnest desire on the part of the teacher for the well-being not just of his immediate interlocutors, but the whole of humanity. This well-wishing should be so steadfast that it remains undiluted even in the face of injustice and oppression. Overlooking people's negative behaviour towards him, the teacher should continue to remain their well-wisher.

The element of trustworthiness (amin) is important in that it ensures that the Islam God has sent to the world will be presented to the people without deletion, addition or distortion. For instance, if the Islam sent by God is akhirah (Hereafter) oriented, it should not become world oriented; if it is spirituality based, it should not become politics based; if it confines jihad to peaceful struggle, it should not become violence based.

Islam asks us to perform jihad by means of the Qur'an, calling this 'greater' jihad. But it never asks its believers to do the 'greater' jihad by means of the gun.

This is a clear proof that jihad is, in actual fact, a wholly peaceful activity, carried out through peaceful methods. It has nothing to do with violent activities or violent threats.

Jihad through the Qur'an means striving to the utmost to present the teachings of the Qur'an before the people. That is, presenting the concept of One God as opposed to the concept of many gods; presenting akhirah-oriented life as superior to world-oriented life; principle-oriented life as against interest-oriented life; a humanitarian-oriented life as more elevated than a self-oriented life and a duty-oriented life as a categorical imperative taking moral precedence over a rights-oriented life.

Jihad, according to Islam, is not something about which there is any mystery. It is simply a natural requirement of daily living. It is vital both as a concept and as a practice because, while leading his life in this world, man is repeatedly confronted by such circumstances as are likely to derail him from the humanitarian path of the highest order.

These factors sometimes appear within man in the form of negative feelings. This is something to which everyone must remain intellectually alert, so that if for any reason there is some danger of a negative mindset gaining the upper hand, he may consciously and deliberately turn himself to positive thinking. Even if circumstances repeatedly place him in situations which are depressing and demoralising, he must never on such occasions lose courage or lose sight of noble goals. The re-assertion of his ethical sense is the real jihad which he has to wage.

From the Islamic standpoint, intention is all-important. Any undertaking carried out with good intentions will win God's approval, while anything done with bad intentions is bound to be disapproved of and rejected by God. In actual fact, intentions are the sole criteria of good or bad actions in the divine scheme of things.

This truth relates jihad to man's entire life and to all of his activities. Whatever man does in this world, be it at home, or in his professional capacity, in family or in social life, his prime imperative must be to carry it out with good intentions and not the reverse. This, however, is no simple matter. In all one's dealings, adhering strictly to the right path requires a continuous struggle. This is a great and unrelenting lifelong struggle. And this is what is called jihad.

Even if one is engaged in good works, such as the establishment and running of institutions which cater for social welfare or academic needs, or if one is personally engaged in social work or performing some service in the political field, in all such works the element of personal glory has a way of creeping in. Therefore, in all such instances, it is essential that in the individuals concerned there should be a strong tendency to introspection, so that they may keep before them at all times the goal, not of personal glory but the greater glory of God.

It is one's intense inner struggle to make all activities God-oriented which is truly Islamic jihad.

An able and righteous man the most treasured asset

Zayd ibn Aslam reports, on the authority of his father, that Umar ibn al-Khattab asked some of his companions to tell him about their ambitions. "I would like to have this house full of money, so that I could spend it in the path of God," volunteered one. Another said that he would like gold – yet another mentioned pearls – so that their wealth could be spent in the furtherance of God's cause. "What I would like more than anything," said Umar, "would be to have this house full of men like Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah, Muadh ibn Jabal and Hudhaifah ibn al-Yaman, so that I could use them for God's work."

(Al-Tarikh al-Saghir)

Initiative and Result

The cover story of Time magazine of December 23, 1991, on the collapse of the Soviet Union, includes an interview of Gorbachev, the former President of the USSR, titled, 'A Man without a Country.'

Readers' impressions were published in letter form in the issue of January, 13, 1992. One reader writes:

The epitaph of history of Mikhail Gorbachev may some day read: Here lies a good man and an idealist who abolished repression and tyranny in the Soviet Union, not comprehending that they were the glue holding that empire together. (George Podzamsky, Verwyn, Illinois).

This is a very apt commentary. It teaches us that the result of any step we take is not necessarily in accord with our wishes, but is more often dependent upon external factors.

Leaving aside the nature of the step taken by Gorbachev, there is an important lesson in its consequences for both individuals and nations. Whenever anyone is on the point of taking a practical step, he must fully realise that the step itself lie within his power and, as such, are subordinate to his wishes. But the results of that step are not, because the moment it is taken, external factors come into play. Only if all of those factors are favourable can the result of the step be as one desires. This is a law as immutable as all other laws of nature. Not even a superpower can alter it.

Those who show mercy will be dealt with mercifully

“The Merciful One shows mercy to the merciful,” said the Prophet. “Be merciful with those on earth. The One in Heaven will be merciful with you.”

(Ahmad, Abu Dawud, Al-Tirmidhi)

In Quest of the Limitless

In the weekly column in the Hindustan Times of October 26, 1991, Mr. Khushwant Singh wrote to the late Charnajit Singh, who had established and bought over innumerable businesses ranging from Campa Cola to furniture, as well as acquiring valuable properties within the country and abroad, including a large hotel in London. A whole fleet of the latest cars was always at his service, etc.

However, he found it difficult to manage this vast business empire. Ultimately, the strain and tension proved too much for him, and he died before he was 51.

Man is never satisfied. That is because human nature is not one of contentment. By his very nature, man desires an unlimited world for himself. That being so, everyone continues in his own sphere to strive towards that end. But finally, when his capabilities fail him the realisation comes to him that his 'limitless world' cannot be constructed in this life. Craving for the limitless, he becomes the victim of his own limitations.

Has nature been cruel to man in casting him into a limited world and then leave him hankering after the limitless? The error is not that of nature but of man. The disposition he was endowed with was meant, on his finding this world inadequate for his purposes, to divert his yearning to the world of the Hereafter. Instead of striving towards selfish ends, he was meant to uncover the secret that what he longs for in the present world will be offered to him only in the Hereafter. But man's personality has become the victim of contradictions. On the verge of success, man has tumbled down into the pit of failure. Even after the realization of his limitations he fails to understand how to reach the limitless world of his fondest imaginings.

Hajj: The Journey of Lifetime

About 5000 years ago the Prophet Abraham was ordered by God to lay the foundations of the Kabah – the House of God in Mecca – and to call people to make a pilgrimage to this House:

“Exhort all men to make the Pilgrimage. They shall come to you on foot and on the backs of swift camels; they shall come from every deep ravine ...” (Qur’an, 22:27)

Today, responding to the call of Abraham and following in the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad, over two million people from every corner of the globe gather at Mecca to perform their Hajj.

Along with the profession of faith, daily prayers, a month-long annual fast and charity to the poor, Hajj is one of the five tenets of Islam. Hajj is a once-in-a-lifetime obligation for every Muslim, male or female, provided he or she is healthy enough to travel and has the means to undertake the pilgrimage.

The Hajj period lasts from the 8th to the 13th of the Islamic month of Dhul Hijjah, and as the pilgrims arrive in Mecca they are lodged in hotels and houses.

One very important obligation during Hajj is the wearing of unstitched clothing comprised of two sheets (women wear normal clothes with a scarf to cover the head). All hajis, rich and poor, black and white, are dressed in this way, so that all men of all countries look alike in identical, simple garments, and no pilgrim may then feel tempted to take pride of place over another.

The Sacred Mosque of Mecca, due to continuous expansion, can accommodate as many as 7 lakh pilgrims at one time. Here the pilgrims encircle the holy Kabah seven times, which symbolically represents how man’s life must revolve around God. Near the Kabah, are two small hills called Safa and Marwah – “Signs of God” as they are described by the Qur’an. The hills, which were previously outside the precincts of the Sacred Mosque, have now been enclosed within its boundaries. The pilgrims walk briskly back and forth seven times between these hills, a distance of about 394 metres. This rite is performed in memory of Abraham’s wife, Hagar, who ran helplessly between the two hills seven times in search of water for her baby, Ishmael, who was suffering from thirst. God was pleased and sent an angel to dig a well from which the baby could drink water. The well, known as Zamzam, still quenches pilgrims’ thirst.

On the first day of Hajj, the pilgrims set out for Mina, which is a small town about 3 miles from Mecca. Here the pilgrims stay three nights and three days. The town, which normally has no more than a few hundred inhabitants, bursts into life on the days of Hajj, when over two million people pour in to settle in tents to perform the rites of stoning the pillars that represent the Devil. It is the place where, in obedience to God’s commandment, Abraham took his son Ishmael to sacrifice him. At that very

moment, Satan appeared here to tempt Abraham to disobey God's command. But he threw pebbles at Satan to drive him away. So did young Ishmael and his mother. God was pleased with Abraham's response and sent an angel with a ram to be sacrificed instead of Ishmael. In commemoration of this act, Muslims sacrifice an animal on the Eidul Azha. Today three pillars stand on the very spot where the incident took place. As one of the rites of Hajj, the pilgrims also throw small pebbles at these stone pillars, which symbolise the Devil within ourselves. This is meant to kill the soul's desires and the ego.

From Mina, the pilgrims go on to Arafat, where the climax of the pilgrimage – "the Standing of Arafat" takes place. For this reason the Prophet said, "Arafat is Hajj. " The centre of attention is the 200 feet high Mount of Mercy from which the Prophet Muhammad preached his last sermon in 632 AD. Seated on a camel, he addressed a crowd of 100,000 laying emphasis on the importance Islam attaches to human equality, regardless of social distinctions, the equal sharing of rights and duties by husband and wife, and the prohibition of usury, etc. Again, speaking with equal emphasis, the Prophet said: "No Arab is superior to a non-Arab and no non-Arab is superior to an Arab. No black man is superior to a red man and no red man is superior to a black, except through taqwa (fear of God). Indeed the noblest among you is the one who is deeply conscious of God. "

Here the pilgrims stand "before God," praying and listening to sermons. Everyone invokes God in his own way: standing or sitting, motionless, going on foot, or mounted. After a short stay here the pilgrims return to Mina via Muzdalifa. After staying again in Mina for two nights, they return to Mecca for the last encircling of the Kabah, which ends the Hajj. Medina, where the Prophet Muhammad's mosque and grave are situated, also attracts pilgrims in great numbers. Though it is not part of Hajj, the pilgrims, out of their great reverence for the Prophet, stay there for a few days also, praying in the Prophet's Mosque and visiting historical sites.

In the present century the number of people performing the Hajj in any given year before World War II might have been as low as 10,000, but this figure has steadily increased, at present exceeding the two million mark – an increase which today is the cause of a major problem.

The unfortunate tragedy of an outbreak of fire in Mina this year, causing over 300 casualties, has given the Islamic world a jolt and made us rethink the planning of the Hajj. The authorities in Saudi Arabia are sparing no effort to see that pilgrims are offered all comforts. However, many pilgrims, especially the elderly pilgrims from the Indian subcontinent, also contribute to the confusion because of their lack of experience. The system of giving private contracts to local people to supervise groups of pilgrims needs a total overhaul, as this results in the provision of poor facilities, particularly the arrangement of tents at Mina and Arafat.

On the days of Mina and Arafat, when everyone lives in tents, all safety precautions should be taken, in particular, the placing of a strict ban on the cooking of food. Pilgrims should not be allowed to carry gas

stoves, and should be asked to rely on-packed food and fresh fruits. But the real answer to fire casualties would appear to be the use of fire proof tents.

As far as possible, elderly pilgrims should now avoid going on pilgrimages and should opt rather for a hajj-e-badal (i.e. hajj performed by someone else on behalf of the pilgrim). The example of countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand is worth emulating as most of their pilgrims are young people. There is also the excellent practice in their countries for couples to go on the Hajj just after getting married. Moreover, as the Hajj is compulsory only once in a lifetime, people should limit themselves to performing it only once. This would to some extent reduce the pressure on the available facilities.

Strenuous and unflagging efforts are a must if the Hajj is to be made 100 percent safe for the ever-increasing annual influx of pilgrims from all over the world.

(Saniyasnain Khan)

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Of all actions, the most sublime is remembrance of God

Abu Darda reports the Prophet as asking his companions: "Should I not tell you of the action that is best and most pure in the presence of your Lord; the action which will raise you up in the sight of God, and is better for you than great expenditure of gold and silver; better too than that you should meet your enemies in battle, striking their necks and they striking yours?" "Do tell us," the Companions replied, "It is remembrance of God," said the Prophet.

(Al-Tirmidhi, *Shama'il*)

Worship

What God most earnestly desires from human beings is worship. The Qur'an says: "I have not created jinn and mankind except to worship Me" (51:56). There are numerous such verses in the Qur'an which elaborate on how the Prophets were sent for this very purpose, that is, to warn or to remind man of this responsibility of his (16:36). This is so important a matter that if a man cannot find opportunities of worship in his own country, he is enjoined to leave it for some other place (4:97).

The dictionary defines worship as bowing before someone and humbling oneself. "The essence of worship is fearfulness and humility," says Lisan al-Arab. The dictionary meaning of the word is also its canonical meaning. Abu Hayyan says: "Prayer means humility: this is the consensus of religious scholars" (Al Bahr al Muhit, Vol. 1, p. 23). That is why the Qur'an uses the word "arrogance" as the antonym of worship. It says, Those who are too arrogant to worship Me will verily enter Hell." (40:60).

Although worship's real connotations are humility and fearfulness, when the word is used in relation to God, it also includes the concept of love. Ibn Kathir writes: "According to the dictionary, worship stands for lowliness ... In the Islamic Shari'ah it is used to express a condition of extreme love coupled with extreme humbleness and apprehension." (Tafsir al Qur'an, Vol. 1, p. 25) Iman Ibn Taimiyah says: "The word 'Ubudiyat (adoring enslavement) expresses a mixture of extreme humility and extreme love." (The Pamphlet on Ubudiyah, p. 28) Hafiz Ibn Qayyem also writes.

"There are two components of worship: extreme love and extreme humility" (Tafsir ibn Qayyem, p. 65).

The essence of worship then is to adopt an attitude of lowliness and humility before God. In the Qur'an, this is expressed by different words, such as Khashiyyah, Tadhurru, Ikhbat, Inabat, Khushu, Khudu and Qunut, etc. To worship God means utter prostration of oneself before Him. The Being before whom the act of worship is performed is no tyrant or tormentor but an extremely kind Being, to whom we owe limitless blessings. So this expression of lowliness before Him is tinged with love.

The relation of man to God is the relation of the humblest creature to an extremely beloved Being. At the very moment when man is shivering in awe of God, when his eyes fill with tears at the thought of Him, his best feelings are even then reserved for His Lord, and he draws closer to God in great expectation. Man, then, finds himself rapt in a love which is utterly agonizing. Though his humility in the presence of God is undoubtedly the result of fear, this fear is not of the kind produced by the sight of a fearful object. It is a feeling which no single word can properly convey. It is a mixed feeling of extreme hope and extreme apprehension, and man is never able to decide which of the two is to be preferred – hope or apprehension. It is a situation of love and fear in which man runs towards the very Being he fears, hoping to receive from Him His divine blessings. It is a state of agony, yet and at the same time a state of solace.

Thus we learn that prayer is basically a psychological experience rather than an external event.

Man, in the last analysis, is a psychological being: so in its definitive form, prayer in relation to man, is the expression of an inner state rather than of an external happening. The Prophet has clearly stated that "righteousness is a thing of the heart" (Bukhari). According to the Qur'an, the essence of worship is to be God-fearing.

'O men, serve your Lord who has created you and those who have gone before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil' (2:21).

Worship, in terms of external expression, means bowing before the Sustainer, while in its inner aspect it stands for that deep realisation of and strong attachment to God in which man is so involved that he can experience the presence of God. The Prophet has been reported as saying, "Pray to God as if you are seeing Him." (Mishkat, The Chapter on Faith). According to this saying, the most sublime form of worship is that in which the worshipper is so lost in thoughts of God that he finds himself very close to Him. His apprehension of the divine presence should be as keen as if God were actually visible. This state of psychological proximity is the most sublime achievement of prayer. All rites of worship are aimed at arriving at that state. The postures to be adopted in the performance of these rites are ordained by God Himself. Anyone who asserts that it is possible to pray to God independently of these God-ordained rites, is making a false claim. Without these rites, no one can become a worshipper, in the real sense of the word. Although man has a soul, which is not visible to us, it is also a fact that man cannot be conceived of in this world without a human body. Similarly, worship may be a psychological reality, but it cannot be conceived of without external, God-ordained religious rites.

Although the word 'worship' covers the entire Shari'ah, in the sense that it embraces whatever man does to follow God's commandments and to seek His pleasure, it is his sentiment of adoring slavishness which provides the stimulus for all of his actions. Yet basically and primarily, worship (Ibadat) denotes that particular act which takes place between man and God. While interaction between man and man is the demand of worship, interaction between man and God is worship in itself. When a man is saying salat he is directly engaged in the worship of God. He bows before the Almighty who has no equal. Whereas, when he obeys God's commandments relating to moral and social dealings with his fellow men, he fulfills his human duties in relation to others. From the point of view of performance, these requirements are as obligatory as special acts of worship. But the difference in nature between the two must be kept in view, for otherwise the true concept of religion cannot be properly understood. While human duties are always contingent upon circumstances, religious duties are absolute.

Let us take an example to clarify the above statement. If, according to God's law, it is the duty of a Muslim to distribute to certain entitled people whatever he receives in inheritance, this does not mean that everyone must strive to acquire property so that this religious obligation may be fulfilled. It means rather that if a Muslim should receive an inheritance – some property or wealth – his faith demands that he deal with it according to the commandment regarding inheritance. It is a duty which is obligatory only on having inherited something, far from it being incumbent on every individual in an absolute sense, as worship is.

This explanation of worship makes it clear that interconnection of love and fear of God is not just an “incentive” in practical life, but the actual goal that we must strive to achieve in this world. All our acts have one aim – to become the means to the psychological discovery which is known as ‘entering into a relationship with God’ and ‘reaching God.’ That is to say that the relation between God and man is not just an external intellectual supposition (e.g. if we repeat certain words and actions, God in heaven will be pleased with us) far and beyond this there is a direct link between God and man. This attitude of adoring slavishness, in its external form, is obedience to God’s commandments, but its inner reality means carrying man to the point where he can meet God, where he may whisper to his Lord, where he may cry and break down in His presence, where he may impatiently embrace Him, where he may feel that he is prostrate at the feet of his Creator. To find God thus in this life is the highest and most sublime reality of religion. The aim of all rites and commandments of religion is to raise man to this level. One who finds God thus in this world, will surely find Him in the next world; one who has failed to find Him on earth should not expect to find Him in the world hereafter.

What are the signs of having found this spiritual wealth? One of the signs is that man begins to receive God’s worldly benefits (20:131). In complying with God’s commandments, whatever you do is apparently a matter of your own choice: you may or may not obey them. But during the performance of these acts, or rites of worship, one experiences particular inner feelings which are not a matter of one’s own choice.

One cannot produce them on one’s own. Then where do these inner feelings come from? These actually come from God. This is ‘food’ for the believer without which His spiritual personality could not survive. It is like the actual food which Mary received directly from God when living in the care of the Prophet Zakariya (The Qur’an 3: 37). When you observe a religious practice, you become aware of a special kind of feeling within you. This feeling is a reward from God for your good deeds. God does not give His best reward on credit! He gives it on cash payment. The believer receives it the very moment he makes himself worthy of it. When our Lord accepts any of our deeds, we surprisingly experience spiritual, nay angelic, feelings within ourselves. This is the introduction to Paradise that God has promised to righteous believers. It is the fragrance of the Garden of Paradise which believers find in this world. Although these inner feelings take the form of a spiritual anguish, they are far more piquant than anything in this world. They cannot be savoured as worldly delights are. Intuition tells us that these inner feelings are reflections of that superior, divine reward which is called Heaven. It is said, therefore, in the Qur’an that the Heaven into which the believers will enter in the Hereafter will be a “known food” (37:41) to them. It will not be a thing unknown, but a thing with which they were already acquainted in the life of the world:

“He will admit them to Paradise He has made known to them” (47:6).

According to Abu Sa’ eed Khudri, the Prophet once said: “The man who goes to Heaven will recognise his home even better than he recognised his house on earth” (Bukhari).

When men give charity “with their hearts filled with awe ...” (Qur’an 23:61); when they are able to recite “the Qur’an in such a way that their eyes are “filled with tears” (S: 86); when, while remembering God, they “forsake their beds to pray to their Lord in fear and hope” (Qur’an 32: 16); when they experience such painful moments as realizing the truth of what is stated in the Qur’an in these words: “ ... and the love of God is stronger in the faithful” (2: 165); when they have the most sublime spiritual experiences; when some hidden truths are unveiled before them; when, with restless hearts and quivering lips, they call their Lord with such inspired words as had never before come to their lips, then they are actually receiving food from their Lord. They are tasting one of the many fruits that their Lord has reserved for them. In this world these fruits take the form of spiritual experiences; in the next world they will take the form of heavenly rewards. Then the faithful will feel that these are the very things of which they had been given a foretaste on earth: “Whenever they are given fruit to eat they will say: ‘This is what we were given before,’ for they shall be given the like” (Qur’an 2:25).

What the blessed are going to receive in the life hereafter has already been introduced to them in the life they left behind. How foolish it would be if they were under the impression that in the next life they would be introduced to tastes, with which they had been previously unacquainted. Similarly, if in this life you have not previously passed through such phases of feeling yourself nearer to God than to all others, how can you expect proximity with God in the Hereafter? Surely, prayer deserves such a great reward as will bring a sense of relief to the worshippers. But this reward will be shared only by those who had known in the world such prayers as has been alluded to by the Prophet in these words: “I found the balm of my eyes in worship” (Nasai).

The Implication of Worship

What God desires of man, first and foremost, is that he display humility in His presence. It is this attitude which is called worship. But man has not been created in a vacuum; he has rather been placed in a world full of diverse circumstances. It is necessary that this spirit of worship should be evinced no matter what circumstances he faces in this world.

1. The first aspect of this relates to his own person. In the course of normal living, whenever he is faced with two options, one path leading to God and the other leading to self and false gods, his spirit of worship compels him at that point to renounce the latter path and take the one which is pointed out to him by God. This happens when he has surrendered his being in all respects, in the physical as well as the spiritual, before the God to whom he has already bowed psychologically. This manifestation of worship is relative to one’s own self, another name for which is submission. Occasions for such submission will occur at home, in the office, in the market, in parliament and in all other such places where the faithful may be faced with making a choice between godly and ungodly ways.

2. The second aspect of worship relates to the external world, that is, to non-Muslims. The precarious conditions of all those inhabitants of this world who have not yet established contact with their Lord, and, as a result, are drifting to a dangerous end in the hereafter, forces the believer to bring them to that

path of worship which he has chosen for himself. It is the aspect of worship which he manifests itself in relation to the common man. Another name for this duty of the believer is bearing witness to the truth or conveying the message of the Lord. The faithful are expected to obey the commandments of God so far as their own selves are concerned. And in relation to non-Muslims they are responsible for conveying the God's message to them.

Now let us take the first manifestation of worship, i.e. submission. It can be divided into two major categories: the individual and collective (or social). Individual obedience means obeying God in those matters which are related to the personal life of the faithful. It covers all those commandments which pertain to morals and dealings with men, like speaking the truth, keeping one's promise, being honest and trustworthy, upholding justice and equality, being hospitable, giving full measure, paying everyone their due, being a well-wisher of all, in short, all those virtues which are related to man's personal life and all those situations in which man must make his own ethical decisions. In all such cases, compliance with divine injunctions means submitting individually, surrendering to the will of God in his own personal affairs. A Muslim is not allowed to disobey God once he knows God's commandments in relation to his personal life, and once he is in position to obey them.

“It is not for true believers-men or women-to take their choice in their affairs if Allah and His apostle decree otherwise. He that disobeys Allah and His Apostle strays far indeed” (33:36).

This individual obedience to God is an obligation on every believer. No man can ever be regarded as a worshipper in the eyes of God unless in his practical life he obeys the commandments of God which have been imposed upon him in relation to all earthly matters. If “worship” in its spiritual connotation means submission of the inner self then in external respects man is required to make a complete surrender to God of his outward self (as opposed to his soul). In other words, man should mould his external life entirely on the pattern indicated by God. It is the duty of all believing men and all believing women to reject other inducements and to submit totally to God in all matters that they face in this life:

“O believers, submit all of you wholeheartedly, and do not walk in Satan's footsteps; he is your sworn enemy” (2:208).

The second category of commandments, for which we have chosen the title 'Ita'ah' (submission), may be termed social commandments. These are commandments the obeying of which does not depend upon the will of an individual believers. These can be carried out only when the whole of society is willing to obey them. That is why such commandments have always been sent by God only when the believers had already established a political organisation among themselves, and when they were in a position to enforce such social laws. Thus the social laws of the Shari'ah are addressed to any Muslim society which is invested with authority, rather than to individuals who have no political power. We find in the history of the Israelites that so long as they were under the rule of the Copts of Egypt, they were not given the legal commandments which appear in the old Testament.

Only when they had left Egypt for the Sinai desert and acquired the status of an independent, authority-invested group, did God send His laws to them (Exodus 15:25). Exactly the same course was adopted in Arabia. During the Meccan period, when the faithful were a minority with no authority, only the basic part of the Shari'ah was revealed, for the establishment of which no political power was required. Every Muslim could adopt those laws in his life by his own personal decision. The rest of the Shari'ah continued to be revealed according to the circumstances. That is to say, detailed commandments regarding social life were given in Medina once the faithful had acquired temporal authority there.

The order in which these laws arrived shows that in ordinary circumstances the faithful are bound to follow only those Islamic laws which were revealed before the acquisition of social authority. The carrying out of the rest of the laws becomes obligatory only when the faithful can, from the seat of government, enforce these laws with authority. The revelation of the shari'ah laws, in accordance with the gradual expansion of the Islamic field of activity, itself shows that these laws are not required in the absolute sense, but only in relation to circumstances. These are always determined in relation to the actual circumstances of the individual or group addressed. The truth is that social and political commandments are directed only at those groups of believers who are in a position to carry them out. Believers with a limited sphere of power are not required to enforce religious laws on a social or national level. The carrying out of orders meets a practical demand, and a demand can be made only of those who have already accepted its validity. This demand, moreover, will be in proportion to their practical ability to carry it out. One clear principle of the Shari'ah is that "God does not charge a soul with more than it can bear" (2: 286). That is to say, no one is entrusted with a responsibility which is beyond his capacity to fulfill. To entrust responsibility to one who does not have the means to discharge it is not God's way. Then how can believers be asked to obey laws, which they are not in a position to comply with. If, taking into account all the details of religious laws, the claim is made that it is obligatory for believers to carry out and enforce these laws in all earthly circumstances, it will amount to saying, for example, that it is the responsibility of each and every Muslim to try to acquire all those financial assets on which Zakat has been fixed, so that he may carry out the duties in relation to Zakat.

All religious orders are equal in form, but their applicability is determined by circumstances. For instance, one order of the Qur'an is to "pray regularly", another order is to 'pay Zakat.' Apparently both these orders are equal in importance just as both are in the imperative tense. But their relevance to different individuals is not always the same. The order to pray regularly is an absolute order which is obligatory on each and every believer, while the order regarding Zakat is conditional, that is, it is obligatory only when one possesses enough wealth to come under the law of Zakat. That is, if a person possesses items taxable under Zakat law, this obligation to pay Zakat will be applicable to him in the absolute sense, just as the order to pray is obligatory for all. But a person who is not in possession of items taxable under Zakat is neither required to pay Zakat nor is he ordered to acquire taxable items so that he may be able to obey the law on Zakat. What is desirable is that the believer should be active in

carrying out duties which are of current relevance rather than engaging in such activities as well bring into existence a duty which is not at that moment applicable to him. For instance, struggling to form an independent state so that all state laws are enforced there.

We learn, therefore, that there are a number of religious duties that are not to be enforced in the absolute sense, being applicable only in relation to circumstances. As the circle of believers goes on expanding, so also do the demands of religion. If there were only one single believer, only that part of religion would be obligatory upon him which relates to his person. In this instance the sole object of divine commandments would be his own person. When the believers increase in numbers to one or several families, then this whole group will be the addressee of the divine commandments. And when a group of believers attain the status of an independent, autonomous society, then it becomes the duty of the whole society to fully carry out the commandments of God regarding social matters. Since such orders cannot be carried out without authority at the social level, whenever a society of believers is asked to carry out divine laws, it becomes incumbent upon the believers to select a political leader in order to carry out the divine laws governing social life under his leadership.

All Islamic commandments are the expression of some psychological truth. When faith is rooted in the heart, it reflects throughout the human psychology. Yet its external expression is in proportion to the opportunities made available by external circumstances. Interrelationships between believers is also of a similar nature. Though it is not possible to structure them in a hierarchical way, they may still be broadly divided into three main stages.

The first stage is that of religious instructions and exhortation. The crux of it is that every Muslim should have in his heart sincerity and well-wishing for every other Muslim (Bukhari, Muslim). In the words of the Bible, he should become his brother's keeper. (Genesis 4:9).

Jarir came to the Prophet. The latter said, "O, Jarir, extend your hand." Jarir asked him why? The Prophet said: "So that you may turn your face to God and be a well-wisher to every Muslim" (Kanzul Ummal, Vol. 1, p. 82).

That is, your attitude in social intercourse should be beneficial to your brother in both the present world and hereafter. And you should avoid any such act as could possibly lead to division and dissension among Muslims.

It is this act which has been described in Qur'an in the Chapter 103, (revealed in Mecca) in these words: 'Exhort one another to truth and patience?' The spirit of worship which manifests itself in one Muslim's dealings With another is described in the Qur'an as exhorting one another to truth and patience. Thus God has highlighted two important aspects of this demand made by faith. One aspect of this demand is that we induce believers in Islam to opt for the courses of action which God finds desirable. Another aspect is that we take recourse to unification so that we may have the strength to face any worldly hurdles which come in the way of remaining firm in this material world on the will of God, and to remain steadfast in the way of God regardless of the difficulties.

The second stage is that of organisation. That is, Muslims should not remain in scattered groups, but, to whatever degree it is possible, should establish discipline among themselves, and regulate social matters along the lines laid down by Moses, who, on reaching the Sinai desert, divided the Israelites into twelve tribes with a leader (Naqueeb) to every group. During the early Meccan days, this social organization existed around the person of the Prophet, Dar-e-Arqam (the house of Arqam) being its centre. The same system was adopted for the Ansar of Medina before the Emigration. At the time of the second oath of allegiance (623 A.D.), when 75 people of Medina (73 men and 2 women) came to the Prophet and accepted Islam, they were told by the Prophet to appoint twelve leaders over them (Al-Bidayah wa al Nihayah, Vol. 3, page 160). So they chose twelve responsible persons from among themselves, three belonged to the Aus tribe and nine to the Khazraj tribe. Then the Prophet addressed them thus:

“You are the guardians of the believers of Medina” (Zarqani, Vol I, p. 382). The leadership of Jafar, who was appointed leader of the emigrants to Abyssinia was also of this nature (Seerat ibn Hisham). Similarly, whenever Muslims spread out from the cradle of Islam-Arabia-into the world, they tried to establish their social structures. In addition to leading an Islamic life and calling others to Islam, they gave basic importance to organization. This kind of systemization can be expected only where social control is already in existence and Muslim are able to perform their religious duties under one leader.

The last stage of Islamic organisation is the formation of political set-up which, in religious terminology, is called Nasbe-Imamat, the appointment of Islamic Imam. The establishment of a political and social leader of Muslims is obligatory according to all schools of religious thought. This matter is so important that there is not a single book on religious law and creeds which has not dealt with this issue.

It is specially stated in Sharh al-Mawaqib and Aqaide al-Nasaf that it is compulsory for Muslims to have an Imam.

With one minor exception, no group disagrees over this issue. Ibn Hazm writes:

All Sunnis, Murjea, Shia, and Khawarij (except now extinct Najdat sect) agree on the obligatory nature of the Imamat” (Al-Melal wa al-Nehal).

The only difference of opinion lies on this matter is that the people of the Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'ah group take this to be a canonical order, while some other groups such as Zaidiya and Mutazela, consider it necessary as a rational measure.

But, as mentioned above, the matter of appointing a political leader is relevant only in a Muslim society which has acquired an independent status as a social group and, as such, is in a position to set up its own separate political organization. The question just does not arise of appointing a political leader over a diversity of believers. That is to say, this commandment is not absolute. It means simply that when a group of Muslims enjoying its own social organization, comes into existence, it is incumbent upon it to organize its social life on the foundations of religion and to appoint a political leader in order to lead an

organized life under his leadership. Political leadership is a manifestation of the social authority of a definable group. Where no social authority exists, on what basis can one be ordained to carry out the commandment of Imamah?

The above statement, has been made from the point of view of the feasibility of enforcing commandments. But there is an equally important requirement of Islam: the principle of gradualness to be observed when enforcing the commandments.

Viewed from this angle, a small Muslim minority, however religiously aware, is not required to launch a campaign for the enforcement of Islamic laws, whether it be surrounded by a non-Muslim majority, or faced by a preponderance of the kind of Muslims who are lacking in any proper Islamic awareness. In a Muslim society which has degenerated into religious apathy, if not apostasy, such a campaign as a first step would be tantamount to a deviation from the Islamic method of gradualness.

The proper way to reform a Muslim society according to Shariah is to spread the basic teachings and initial commandments of religion far and wide, so that to the greatest possible extent, Islam's legal and social laws become generally acceptable. Only after this stage will the time be ripe for starting a movement for the enforcement of God's commandments.

The importance of gradualness in enforcing commandments is stressed in a famous tradition of the Prophet's wife 'Aishah, according to which it was so essential in the eyes of God that, in many instances, He did not send the believers His commandments in their full and final form. On the contrary, most of the commandments were sent in installments. Where systemization was subsequently required, the principle of Naskh (abrogation) came into operation, (Qur'an 2:106 and 16:101) "by which certain verses of the Qur'an abrogate or modify others, which are then called mansukh (revoked). What is generally at issue is the modification of a universal meaning by a more specific one, a modification caused by a historic change of circumstances. In this way, by naskh, the Qur'an accommodates itself to the relativities of the human situation" (Cyril Glasse, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, p. 298). According to Hudhaifah, it is impermissible for anyone who is not conversant with this principle of Naskh to preach or to explain the verses of the Qur'an.

Faith one attaches to God

Bara' ibn Azib reported the Prophet saying:

"The strongest knot of faith is loving for the sake of God and animosity for the sake of God."

'(Ahmad, *Musnad*)